

INTERVIEW

Sid Warner etal.

YEAR

2007

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: Sid Warner, Buford Rohrbaugh, Steve Hilker

DATE: February 22, 2007

PLACE: Garden City, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED/COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

SOUND RECORDINGS: 2 - 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT:

ORAL HISTORY
Warner, Sidney etal
Interview Date: February 21, 2007

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)

Interviewees: Sid Warner (SW)B. Rohrbaugh(BR) S. Hilker(SH)

Tape 1 of 2

Side A

BR - "I didn't go back with him and he didn't survive the first fire fight, the Germans got him or somebody else." He said, "I don't know and I don't want to know. You just didn't go back unless the whole unit was ordered to."

SH - When my dad went into Bastogne, he went in on the nineteenth of December and he came out on the twentieth of February. That was another two months of combat, there. He always hated the Christmas Carol, Silent Night.

JS - They could hear the Germans?

SH - They could hear it and he never liked it much. If you ever heard Bing Crosby sing White Christmas, that was another one they played. He just said that was a tough, tough time.

JS - Did they talk about getting mail or food?

SH - Whenever he would get cookies from his mother, they were always just crumbs. They ate the crumbs. They were pretty well involved most of the time they were there so they didn't get much.

JS - They ate K-rations?

BR - In the Bulge they ate whatever the Germans cooked them after they captured them. He told John and I that they took ten Germans out of a barn and gave them four rifles to go scavenge food. If they didn't come back with the four rifles, the rest of the Germans weren't going to eat. They knew where stuff was hidden. They came back with hams and canned goods in jars. They knew where to look. Dad said, "We didn't have any idea where to look." They would kill milk cows and dress them and eat them. He said, "One thing about the German Army, when they surrendered they were done"

INTERVIEW

**Sidney Warner
Buford Rohrbaugh
Steve Hilker**

YEAR

2007

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: Sid Warner
Buford Rohrbaugh(BR)
Steve Hilker (SH)

DATE: February 21, 2007

PLACE Cimarron, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

This is an interview with Sidney Warner, friend of Donald Rohrbaugh and Gene Hilker, both now dead. The latter two fought in the Battle of the Bulge and told many stories to sons, Buford Rohrbaugh, son of Donald Rohrbaugh and Steve Hilker, son of Gene Hilker. Rohrbaugh served as a radioman and Hilker was a paratrooper. Both men were wounded more than once and in the last years told their friend and their sons some of their wartime experiences. They realized that their stories would die untold when they were gone.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSEDCOMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

Graphic stories of the experiences in World War Two at the final months of the war in Europe, primarily at the Battle of the Bulge were retold.

SOUND RECORDINGS: 2- 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 2 hours

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 21 pages

ORAL HISTORY
Stories of Donald Rohrbaugh and
Louis Eugene Hilker
Interview Date: June 21, 2006

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Sid Warner, friend (SW)
Buford Rohrbaugh (BR)
Steve Hilker (SH)

Tape 1 of 1
Side A

JS - They actually had to learn to fight when they got over there?

BR - He did say one time that they were about half way through the Maginot Line and they pulled them back out to train them to take pillboxes like they had been taking for the last three days. Sometimes they got a little ahead of where they thought they were.

JS - Did he ever talk about what he thought about war?

SH - He told me one time he wouldn't take a million dollars for his experience and he wouldn't do it for that again.

JS - Did anyone ever talk about that to you?

BR - No, he didn't say anything.

JS - You were younger, but there were things going on in the world; did they ever express anything about the politics from their point of view. Was anything said about getting into another war?

BR - My dad served on the draft board. When I quit college in 1969 or so, he told me he would guarantee me an all expense trip to Southeast Asia if I didn't stay in school. When they drew the lottery for the draft, I came out at 326 so I didn't go.

SH - My dad was adamantly against Viet Nam War. My older brother tried to volunteer and then could not pass his physical and my dad was so upset that he wanted to volunteer. Dad did express his opinion about the Viet Nam War.

JS - From his experience in World War Two?

SH - I suppose that was some of it and the way that politics were going and that they were trying to run the war from Washington. I think that was why Dad was upset.

BR - In the late '60s they were behind what needed to be done. That is why he told me not to quit school. The war drug out and McNamara and Johnson were running it. If you were not going to make an all out commitment to win the war whatever it takes, don't start it. They didn't like what was done in Korea, and Viet Nam got even worse.

JS - Let's talk about Korea. That would have been '48 to '52?

SW - '50 to '53.

JS - It didn't start until '50?

SH - Buford's dad was older than my dad, but they were both older soldiers.

BR - They weren't eighteen year olds. Dad was thirty-four.

SH - My dad was twenty-four and was an aircraft inspector and didn't have to go.

JS - You wanted to say something about the Korean War?

SW - I remember somebody saying that Louie Magouirk and Gene were going to go down to work for the Vornado Corporation at Wichita. They thought they would get deferred because of the defense contracts there. Louie got drafted and he was about third in line and the fellow said, "The first twelve of you guys are going to the Marines." They started in with the first fellow and said, "Do you have anything important at home that needs taking care of?" He said, "No." The fellow said, "Okay, you ship out tonight then." Louie didn't say anything, but Keith Wilson from here in town was about eighth in line and he had all kinds of things by the time they asked him. He was two weeks later to go. There were two fellows that thought they were going to get deferred and one ends up in the European Theater as a paratrooper in some of the hottest spots. The other one ends up in the Pacific in some of the hottest spots in World War Two. What an irony.

JS - Was Louie drafted or did he volunteer?

SW - He was drafted.

JS - Your dad?

SH - He volunteered, he did have a deferment.

JS - Do you know why?

SH - Pressure from his mother, mostly. He was a college football player. Everybody was going to the war and there was this big strapping guy and he is working in a factory in Wichita as an aircraft inspector. He read about the paratroops and he was a pilot and thought that was a hotshot outfit. The pay was pretty good. They got an extra fifty bucks for being in the paratroops. He told me when they said he would get fifty bucks, he thought, "I can sure do that for fifty dollars." They were only getting like thirty-six.

BR - I remember him telling my brother, Dave, and I one time that that was one of those things in hindsight, "Nobody should volunteer."

SW - There is a story that Steve's grandfather was a part of Pershing's group that went after Poncho Villa in Mexico. A horse fell with him and banged up his hip. He had to have been a volunteer then.

SH - He said they would get in those villages down there and ask where he went and they wouldn't tell.

JS - Military tradition is in your family?

BR - My grandfather had a Presidential Citation for the Indiana Unit he was in during the Civil War. He was a cannoneer.

SH - My great grandfather was in a Kentucky Regiment and there were two John Roses so we don't know which one he was.

JS - Do you think in this community there was that military tradition in families?

BR - That is part of the reason that Dad volunteered. The talk was that he had a deferment and Dad was County Clerk. He heard that talk was around town that Gene Rohrbaugh's boys weren't doing their part so Dad went down and volunteered. Mother never forgave him for that.

SW - Dad's grandmother finally let him enlist in the First World War and he was in the Motor Corps. They were teaching him to be a welder. His older brother, John Warner was two years older and he was in the Army. He got that flu and had a real high temperature. It ended up cooking his brain and he ended up being in a Veterans' Hospital the rest of his life. Dad didn't get overseas but he got out late in 1919. He wanted to volunteer to drive an ambulance because he was forty-four, but he didn't get to do that.

JS - One of the questions that I ask is what did your family or the community think when you were enlisted or drafted. It would be your feeling that they were supportive of the war?

BR - Oh yeah, when Dad went in, Leroy Wallace was already gone. Alberta, his wife, moved in with Mom to help take care of the four kids that Mom and Dad had. They lived together while Dad and Leroy were overseas.

SW - Buford Rohrbaugh was killed on Luzon in June, 1945.

BR - He was my uncle and was killed after the war ended. After the agreement was signed it was on some island in the Pacific where the Japanese had not gotten the word that the war was over. A sniper shot and killed him. That is the reason he was the last Gray County man to get killed. That is how I got my name because Mom was pregnant with me in '48 and I was born in '49. Uncle Bud just lived a half mile away and he came driving in the yard one day and came in to have coffee. He put a twenty-five dollar Savings Bond down there made out to Buford Rohrbaugh. He said, "If it's a boy and you name him Buford, I will give you the bond." I still have it.

JS - Your dad talked to you about the war?

SH - He really talked pretty extensively. We have a CD that we recorded. It was a cassette then and we have burned it to a CD. It was hard to get him to talk a lot but as he knew his health was failing. We poured some scotch to him and had a family get-together and we were sitting around talking. Enough of us had pieced together stories from him over the years that we got a pretty good interview out of him. He was in the 101st Airborne. He started out in the 506th Company, which was The Band of Brothers, which was famous. He transferred to the 501st. When he transferred he was back in the 506th again. That came out after he passed away. It let me follow his tracks.

JS - You say he was twenty-four?

SH - He was twenty-four.

JS - Was he married?

SH - No, I think they got married when he got back.

JS - This would have been what year?

SH - He went in, in '43.

JS - He was in Europe?

SH - Yes, his first combat action was on June 5, 1944, the night before the invasion. He was shot about twenty minutes after he landed through his arm. They had armbands with the American Flag on them. They were trying to rally up and find each other. The guy next to him got shot through the armband and

hit his heart. My dad had some ammunition clips. They went through his bicep and hit that and stopped. They realized it was stupid to be wearing white armbands. The Germans were firing at those bands. They were dropped so far from their drop that they were not even on their map. They did not know where they were. They found a little village that was not on their map.

JS - How many were in this group?

SH - When he first got shot it was he and two other guys and one of those was killed. Dad said he went running down the road and dove in a low spot in the ditch and landed on top of the other guy who said, "My gosh, I thought you were dead." They were all scattered. He told me the name of the man who was killed, but I don't remember now.

JS - They were prepared that they might not be dropped where they were supposed to be? They had maps of the area?

SH - They had maps of the area but they didn't think they were going to be dropped as far away as they were. What happened was that there was so much anti-aircraft fire and they got too low. Dad said his parachute was open about four seconds before he hit the ground. Most of their casualties on the first day were drop injuries. Broken legs and ankles, a lot of their equipment was lost and the parachutes snapped open. They had these big packs. As soon as the chute came open that dropped and a lot of guys didn't even have their rifles.

JS - He went through training to be a paratrooper?

SH - Yes.

JS - Did he think his training served him well?

SH - Yeah, in my notes here, there were 5800 that showed up to volunteer and 1948 made it. For every one that showed up about three made it through the training.

JS - How many weeks was the training? Where was it?

SH - Camp Takota, Georgia and it is Fort Benning now. They don't go to Takota anymore. Seventy-five percent of all the officers that tried out washed out and sixty-six percent of all the volunteers did not make it. There was a Mount and they would run six miles in full gear to the top of that. They did that three or four times a week. He was a football player at KU and was in the best shape of his life when he was in training.

JS - They also trained in jumps, right?

SH - They did, and a lot of the guys rode in an airplane for the first time when they jumped out. Dad had a pilots' license.

JS - You would think the training would not be too long because at that point they would want to get soldiers over there.

SH - They trained these guys a lot because they had never dropped guys into combat before. They were still skeptical. Hitler had one good operation and the rest failed so they were not sure that was a tactic that was going to work.

JS - Let's go back to when they landed. Did they eventually hookup?

SH - They did, they would all get together and say what their objective was and what they were supposed to do and they would go start on that. They eventually would find others that had reached their objectives. There were some locks near Carentan, France and as the Invasion Troops were to come inland they were to advance over these bridges at the locks so they could go forward. They found where they were supposed to be.

JS - They were following the invasion?

SH - No, they were ahead of it.

BR - They had to secure those because where they had landed were causeways through flooded ground. They had flooded all the farm ground around there so the causeways were just elevated roads. That is what the paratroopers went in to do; to pick out gun emplacements and to secure the bridges.

SH - My dad was dropped nine miles from where he was supposed to be. There were twenty-eight planes that went back to England with their paratroopers still on board. For whatever reason there was a lot of chaos. They were supposed to jump from 1500 feet and he jumped from between four and five hundred feet.

JS - When were they able to find out that the invasion was going to be successful?

SH - They didn't know for several days. They could hear the combat and they were involved in heavy combat. They had no idea what was going on as far as success was concerned.

BR - In fact, they had no idea until they crossed the bridge.

SH - They could hear the fighting on the beaches and all that with heavy artillery from the Germans. They could hear that, but they did not know what was going on. Eventually, some Americans would show and they would get some idea how

it was going. I should back up. When they were flying over the Channel, you could look down and you could not imagine there were that many ships in the world. It felt like you could have just walked from ship to ship.

JS - Do you think they knew how historic that invasion was?

SH - Yes, I think they did. I don't know if they were thinking that. A lot of them were worrying about if they were going to be alive tomorrow. When they saw the ships they knew and they knew by how many planes and gliders that were being launched that it was a big deal. It looked like there were just little pieces of water between ships.

JS - No one really knew ahead of time. They kept all of it really secret, didn't they? They eventually hooked up with other Americans and kept pushing on or did they wait there or what?

SH - They just accomplished their objectives and then as the invasion forces went through, they were relieved. He jumped with about a hundred and forty men. Three weeks later there were seventy-four of them.

JS - Just about one-half of them and when they were relieved, what did they do?

SH - They went back to England and got refitted and new guys showed up. Later they went into Operation Market Garden and they tried to capture seven bridges into Germany. He dropped at Nijmegen, and they were supposed to hold their ridge about three days. They were there for seventy-two days in combat. The British really got chewed up there. They dropped in 10,000 paratroops; ten days later at Arnhem they came out with 2000. The rest were either killed or captured. Those were the last British in the movie "A Bridge Too Far".

SW - Arnhem was at the bridge over the Rhine. They had to get across those seven bridges and the British were supposed to move down that roadway and the paratroops could hold the different positions on the bridges. The British couldn't make as much headway as they intended and they stopped for tea so they slowed down in front of the 101st. Those fellows had spotted a couple of German tankers and told the British, "Don't go that way." Those guys tried to go that way and it knocked them out in just a few minutes.

JS - The American soldier's opinion of the British soldiers was not good?

SH - On this particular operation, my dad dropped at Nijmegen and it was supposed to be cleared. They could see German tanks on the ground and actually that is where some SS Division was spending it's R&R. They were coming down and they could see them. The British paratroops, in my dad's perception, were every bit as good as the American paratroops. That was why

they were so frustrated when they watched these British that were supposed to be running right down the middle.

JS - Because they knew these British paratroopers were up there?

SH - My dad was wounded for the second time in this operation at a little town about the size of Ingalls. It had five or six hundred people. He was shot in the hip as they were going back and forth across the street. He had made it across the street and I don't remember if it was the sergeant or lieutenant behind him when there was a shot. He looked back and the fellow was lying in the street. He had just bent over to get hold of him and he was dead. It felt like somebody just branded him. The shell went into Dad's but cheek and hit his bone, but it felt like somebody just laid a hot poker on his butt.

JS - That was the second time he was wounded?

SH - Yeah.

JS - After they were wounded did they, then, go back to a hospital?

SH - He went back and got stitched up and was out in about two weeks.

JS - They put him back in combat?

SH - Yes, the doctor sent him on his bicep wound when they were relieved. They left big old scars because you couldn't get airlifted out. The third time he was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, he never even reported it. It was just in the palm of his hand which was where Buford's dad was wounded. He thought it was just a flesh wound and then in 1946 his hand started drawing up and it wouldn't work quite right so they went to the doctor and they X-rayed it and there was a piece of shrapnel. It had worked around to a nerve so he went to Wichita to have it removed. He got two Purple Hearts, but not the third one. He remembered where it happened on January 1, 1945.

JS - On May 5th, 1945 was he still in Europe?

SH - He was in Burchess Garden.

JS - Did he say how they heard that and how the people felt?

SH - Yes, and I have some letters from him about how frustrated they were getting because they were sent to Burchess Garden because they thought Hitler might try to escape to the Eagle's Nest.

SW - He wasn't in the 506 then?

SH - I can't answer that because they went by combat points and they were already thinking some of them would have to go to Japan. Dad had enough points he was not going to have to go. JT Cox, who was from Cimarron, was in the paratroops, but he ended up being a glider rider. He was going to have to go to Japan. He was one of my dad's classmates. He ended up in the 17th Airborne training to go for the invasion of Japan. Dad told of drinking Hitler's wine and he sat at Hitler's desk.

JS - They were just sort of there?

SH - They were there because that was a stronghold of Nazis and they thought that is where Hitler might go if he left Berlin. They ended up staying, staying and staying. I think it was August before he got home. His letters show the level of frustration those guys had. They were still supposed to maintain a level of conditioning. My dad had been through all those operations and was not the least bit interested in conditioning and training. He was ready to come home. The war in Europe was over and he knew he wasn't going to Japan.

JS - Did he say anything, as he was moving forward about the concentration camps?

SH - On that taped interview that we have of him he did. My brother-in-law is Jewish and had relatives that perished in some of the camps. He saw some camps and could smell them before they saw them. There was one where they made them go through. When my brother-in-law was there, he would act like he had not seen them or been there at them. He didn't want to talk to Bob about what he saw at the concentration camps. My brother-in-law asked if he had seen any of the camps and he said, "No." Nobody corrected him.

JS - Your dad was sent home in August, right? That would have been when we were dropping the bombs.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Sid Warner (SW)
 Buford Rohrbaugh (BR)
 Steve Hilker (SH)

Tape 2 of 2

Side A

SW - There were two Hazard Divisions that had been pulled out of the Normandy area to get rest and to recuperate and get more replacements. They picked a quiet spot and they were planning the breakthrough into Germany at the end of the year. The paratroopers paid a terrific price because the British troops couldn't break through down that road. The Germans had better troops there with heavy stuff and the British Airborne Division was six or eight miles from

where they were supposed to be dropped. Part of them got in there and they just had to surrender.

SH - When these guys got into one village, I don't know if it was Arnhem, but the German Artillery was so heavy that Dad and another guy crawled into some candy ovens. There was a candy factory there. There was just no where to go. They stayed there until the shooting stopped.

JS - Did your fathers have any opinion of the German Army and how well they were trained or how they fought?

BR - My dad had a lot of respect for the Germans. He said they were just like us, clean people. He had very little use for the French. He didn't like the French and the Arabs were worse. He liked the English and the Australians. He thought the French were lazy.

SH - My dad ran into the German Parachute Division twice. He said they were ruthless. He had a high opinion of the German Combat soldier. Later in the war, in January of '45 as the tide turned, and they got relieved at Bastogne which was where Buford's dad was, they were cut off just like they were. He pulled off the weapon from the body of a boy about sixteen years old.

JS - Did he bring other souvenirs?

BR - He had some money and I asked where he got it. He said, "I took it out of a dead German's pack." I asked if that bothered him and he said, "No, we had just got through Belgium and they had lined eleven GIs up on the altar and executed them and I wasn't in a good mood about German soldiers right then. That money was sticking out as I ran down the road and I just grabbed a handful of it. The guy had been cut in two with a machine gun."

SH - Like in the Battle of the Bulge, they had massacred a lot of the Americans at Normandy there was not a lot of quarter given on either side. This is a holster, I have the gun also, that he got. The name is inside of it. It is Lieutenant Doctor Hennaed, a German Doctor. They had just overrun a field hospital and they just disarmed them and left them. That holster is from an SS officer and I have that gun also. Obviously none of them were living or they would not have given them up.

JS - They were particularly hated weren't they?

SH - Oh yeah. Those are two of his Purple Hearts. I have a newspaper article from my grandmother but I couldn't find it to bring. It tells of him getting the Distinguished Service Cross. We don't have that. I need to follow up on that. This is one citation he griped about, "Corporal Lewis Eugene Hilker, Jr. while serving with the Army of the United States distinguished himself by heroic

achievement action. On 7 June 1944, in the vicinity of C(?) France he voluntarily accompanied a small group across open terrain accompanied by enemy fire in an attempt to prevent an enemy force of unknown size from reaching concealed positions in a wooded area. From there, they would direct harassing fire on the regiment defending the all important locks near the town. Armed only with a machine gun and carrying very little ammunition, Corporal Hilker took up a position 900 yards in front of his lines and held off the enemy until his ammunition was expended. He then withdrew with the group, drawing enemy fire after him so that the other members of the Regiment occupying defensive positions could open fire on the enemy. The outstanding courage and devotion to duty of Corporal Hilker contributed greatly to affecting the surrender of a large enemy force with a minimum of ammunition and loss of lives. His actions are in accordance with the highest of military service. He entered military service in Kansas."

JS - What did he gripe about?

SH - That he and the other guy only got a Bronze Star and the Lieutenant got a Silver Star. "The only difference was that he was a Lieutenant and we were enlisted guys." Didn't Don get a Silver Star?

BR - Not that we know of, Dad's records were burned in a warehouse fire in 1957 in Saint Louis so Catherine always wanted his Purple Heart. Before Dad passed away, John got hold of Senator Moran's office and through other sources they got his European Theater of Operations medal, his rifleman's badge and his Bronze Star. Not being military, I wasn't smart enough to know. After Cynthia, my daughter, married Kevin who is active military today, John showed it to him and he said he won it three times. It had two Stars up on here. He said that is three, but we have no citation.

SH - On my dad's discharge papers, it says, "Bronze stars, two Oak Leaf Clusters. That is two more.

JS - When did they get them, while they were over there or when they got home?

BR - It depends, part of them they got while they were over there. Dad nearly severed his arm with that artillery shell. He was lucky to be alive; he was up wandering around when an Army Field Hospital was moving up. A doctor was driving by and saw him and told his driver to go look at him. He had lost a lot of blood and they wanted to take his arm off below the elbow so he didn't go back. The field hospital stopped the bleeding and bandaged it. One of the surgeons came by and asked him how he was doing and his tendons were sticking out of the bandage about an inch and a half. He said, "I am doing alright but these are kind of bothering me." The old surgeon just pulled a pair of scissors out of his pocket and cut them off. There is no feeling in the tendons and they were going to cut his arm off anyway so it didn't matter. There was a young captain fresh

over from the States and out of medical school. Dad had to sign a release to let him to try to save the arm. If it didn't work he would have to give up his elbow. They saved it, but he had stiffness because they had to stretch those tendons back out that got cut off. The only feeling he had in his hand was skin deep. They put aluminum foil in there to try to get those nerves to grow down, but it never took.

SH - I remember when we would shake hands, he would say, "I just never have the grip I used to have."

BR - We would pick up 100 pound sacks of cake and he could pick them up with his left hand all day long, but about two sacks and his right hand was gone. He had one of the pieces of shrapnel that was still in his arm. It was about the size of a quarter and had threads on it like part of a shell case. He was lucky to be alive. He got blown out of a foxhole in the Bulge. He had treatment at the VA Hospital at Wichita. His doctor told him that was quite a medical record, "Shell shock somewhere in Belgium." As long as he was in the foxhole he was fine. As soon as they put him up top he didn't know who he was or where he was or anything else. They took him to the aid station and he could function all right they sent him back up. They told him after a while that steel pot on his head would give him a headache because he would have trouble with his neck. He had a paper in his pocket if any officer chewed him out for not having the steel pot on; he just wore the liner and carried the steel pot. When they came under fire, he put the steel pot on. He had this letter from the doctor saying he could do that.

JS - When he came home from the war, do you ever remember your mother saying he talked about the war to her?

BR - My four older siblings say they know hardly any of the war stories because he would not talk about it. Catherine says that not too long after Dad came home, Mom and Dad had some friends over and they were playing cards. Donnie found some caps and crawled behind the divan and hit one of those caps with a hammer. Dad was flat on the floor. He embarrassed himself to death, he just reacted. I think that is why John and I heard more stories than the others because there was GI combat on TV and we would watch that.

SH - I just badgered my dad about the stories.

JS - Do you think he talked to your mother about it at all?

SH - Yes, she worked in an aircraft plant in Wichita. They were living in Wichita then. She would give me enough information to where I would pester him and get him to say something. I would ask him, when I was a little kid, "Did you kill any Germans?" He would never say anything. He told me a story about when they were in Operation Market Garden. I don't remember where they were. He

was going forward. He was a forward observer for a Mortar Platoon. Those guys generally didn't survive too long. This supposedly was a secure town and he just walked around a corner and the next block down there were two German staff officers standing out there smoking. I asked him, "Did you kill them?" He said, "No, I went right back around that corner running as fast as I could," When I asked him why, he said, "If they were confident enough to stand out on the sidewalk smoking cigarettes, two officers, there were German troops there too." He said, "We were better served getting back to tell them it was not secured."

JS - The men that you visited with, did they tell you about their experiences?

SW - Not much, they were pretty quiet. Brice Ramsey told of a bomb they dropped on a palm forest and hit a lot of Japanese.

JS - Did they talk about the friends that they made and did they keep in touch with them?

SH - My dad went to a lot of reunions. That would be where the stories would come out. They didn't talk much here in town, but at the reunions they would get to talking. My brother went with Dad once and one of the guys came up and put his arm around my older brother. He had this big old bent over nose and he told my brother that my dad had given it to him in a fight over in London. They were trained so much as paratroopers and when they got passed over it was stressful.

BR - They assigned the 84th Infantry to the 82nd Airborne and they took over Marseilles, France like the 101st took over Bastogne. They were cut off and overrun. Dad said he took the same jump off the tailgate of a truck that the 82nd did. "When they got to us and relieved us, the 82nd went to England and we went to Holland." They were there for R & R for seven days. The 84th Infantry Division didn't land in France over Omaha Beach, until November of '44. The war ended in '45 and the 84th Infantry suffered 69.4 percent casualties in that less than a year's time. They were just chewed up.

JS - You wonder how they went on.

SH - The trucks that he was talking about, when they left Paris when the Battle of the Bulge broke out, my Dad was on leave in Paris. He had been to a USO show the night before and he went back to the USO dance the next day. The gal asked him what he was doing there. He came to get something. She said, "The 101st left last night." That was news to him. He had been out on the town. He went and he was on the one of the last trucks out of Paris. From the time they left the States until they came back, their casualty rate was 150 per cent.

JS - Did they know that?

BR - It is from research, now.

SH - Dad said, "You didn't make friends with the new guys because they were always the first ones that got killed."

BR - One time Dad told me and my son-in-law after he got back from Iraq that the first thing that you had to come to grips with was it was either your time or it wasn't. After you had come to grips with that, you could function. It might be God and country that got you over for, but it was cornered cat that got you out. You were just like a cornered animal when you got in the scrapes. My son-in-law told me had to do the same in Iraq. If it is your time, it doesn't make a difference how bad or good a soldier you are.

JS - Did either of your fathers say anything about their religious faith? Did it help them? Did they pray?

SH - I just recently got in contact with a young man in Holland who takes care of graves around Arnhem. We have been exchanging information and he put me in contact with a guy that served with my dad. He has talked to me on the computer and it has been fascinating. He takes care of a grave of an American man called, Francis Verman, who was killed right behind my dad. They called him the priest, he was such a devout Catholic. They were walking amongst flooded grounds right down next to the dikes so their head wouldn't be up above the dike. A mortar round from the Germans came in and landed next to Francis and killed him. The ground was soft and it impacted fairly deep and my dad was right behind him. My dad had written Francis's mother in 1946 and they had posted that letter in his handwriting on the site. It was fairly graphic about what had happened. The kid that was taking care of Francis's grave wanted to know if I knew anything. My dad was a pretty good friend of Francis's, who was like the priest of their little unit. They didn't have one and they kind of looked to him. He was one of the early guys and was at camp with them. In my dad's Headquarters Mortar Platoon, there was he and a guy named Doc Holden from Oklahoma. They were the only two that started at camp and went all the way through till then.

SW - There is a fellow named Howard Gray who was not from Cimarron, but he told that they would take coats and overshoes off guys that had been killed because they were cold. There were only six or seven of the guys that started in camp with him that got clear through.

SH - Talking about overshoes, that truck that my dad caught to go to Bastogne. He said, "They were telling us hurry, hurry and I grabbed two things to take, a pair of overshoes and an overcoat. They didn't tell us where we were going. We had no idea where we were going. I just had this feeling while I was running through there so I took overshoes and an overcoat."

BR - They were just the opposite, they took them out of the frontlines on the 18th of December and on the 21st they sent them to Marseilles. They dropped them eleven miles out and told them what they needed for an eleven mile hike. They had been on the frontline for weeks and they thought they were going back. Everybody threw their overcoats and overshoes back in the truck. They knew they were in deep trouble when down the road they issued them two bandoliers of ammo. Six hours later their Division had two Jeeps left. They told them, "This German spearhead offensive was coming through here and we want you to stop it and we don't expect to see any of you."

JS - What was their opinion about not getting the right equipment and information?

BR - They had a job to do. Every hour they bought here saved thousands of lives back there.

SH - His dad had been out of combat just a little bit. My dad had come out of Market Garden where they had been in combat about seventy-two days. They were just getting refitted. They had about two or two and a half months to get refitted because they lost over half of their men and equipment. It was a little different from what his dad experienced.

SW - They were pulled out of combat and were headed back to Paris. They were there seventy-two days and it started on September 17th. It ended about a week later. They found out they couldn't get that last bridge and they had to retreat.

JS - Did they ever say anything about how difficult it was to follow orders or anything like that? A lot of the men said they were used to it at home because they were told what to do there.

BR - Dad made the one comment about that. He was a radioman and the platoon structure is that your scouts are out front and then the squad is behind that. He said, "You are out front, but it is better than being in back with the squad because if you get three soldiers with artillery they would just go around. Artillery fire would always come in behind me." The way the army taught the officers was that the radio men were supposed to move back behind the squad and direct it. Dad said, "Nobody goes back."

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Side B

BR - He didn't go back with them and he didn't survive the first firefight, whether the Germans got him or somebody else. He said, "I don't know and I don't want to know. You just didn't go back unless the whole unit was ordered."

SH - When my dad went into Bastogne, he went in on the nineteenth of December and he came out on the twentieth of February. That was another two months of combat there. He always hated the Christmas Carol, *Silent Night* because they could hear that. There were times he would get a little melancholy about hearing Bing Crosby singing *White Christmas*. That was another one they played and he said that was a tough, tough time.

JS - Did they talk about getting mail or food from home?

SH - Whenever he would get cookies from his mother they would be crumbs, but they would eat the crumbs. They didn't get much because they were pretty well involved while they were there.

JS - They were eating the K-rations, I guess?

SH - At the Bulge they ate whatever the Germans could find after they captured them. They took ten Germans out of the barn and told them to go scavenge food. If they didn't come back with the four rifles, the rest of the Germans weren't going to eat. They knew where stuff was hidden. They came back with hams and jars of food. They knew where to look. He said, "We didn't have any idea where to look." They would shoot milk cows and dress them. He said once they had the Germans, when the regular German Army surrendered, they were done. He said once they started cooking you would just sling your M-1 over your shoulder and get in line to get something to eat. When they came out of the Bulge, his Company had only thirty-four officers and men left. They came out on the fourteenth of January and went back into the frontline on the twenty-first of January. They had stopped the Bulge and cut that off. The Americans wanted to cut that in two to cut the Germans off. Some officers didn't want to, but Patton wanted to do that. They took Dad's Company since there were only thirty-four of them left and one of the Generals decided to send a patrol across from the American side through that narrow gap to the English to see how far across it was and see what they were going after. They decided to do it two in strength which was like thirty-six guys so they just used their Company. That is the reason they only got seven days. It took them three nights; they couldn't move during the day, but in daytime they would mark down what vehicles were getting out. They would estimate the soldiers that were moving out and they joined up with the English on the other side.

SW - When it all started, it became obvious that Eisenhower needed to buy command so the British had men on the north and on the other side was the American First Division. Eisenhower put Bradley's troops under Montgomery so

Montgomery could tidy up the front. He was to have the Big Red One pull back and do some other things. The Big Red One held the shoulder on the north side of the Bulge and the Germans couldn't get started. They kept going out west and the troops that got hit real hard was the 106th Division that were just fresh, green. They got overrun and about 6000 of them surrendered. The Second Division that pulled out of Sherwood Forest there were to the south side of the 106th and those were pretty hardened troops. They had been beaten up and those were the guys that were retreating and that Steve's dad ran into when they were coming into Bastogne. Those guys were all heading west and it was pretty tough because they didn't know just how strong they were. You had the Sixth Panzer Army on the north and they had the Fifth Army on the south. They were the ones that were hitting Bastogne hard. Hitler decided they wanted to take Bastogne no matter what and they couldn't get it done. I thought it was interesting how they had those paratroopers; they had some tank groups in that pocket as well and some artillery. In the outlying area is where the paratroopers were and they were scattered in between so they could hold off German attacks. They would have a lot of ammunition, but they held them back. Patton didn't get in there until, maybe Christmas Day, is that right Steve?

SH - Yes.

SW - They came in from the southwest and they had some tough, tough fighting after they linked up just to push them back out of that Bastogne area over east.

JS - We are on side B of the second tape so we will need to wrap it up in a little bit. I have a question. I want to know what the fascination is with World War Two other than people in the community. It is evident that all three of you know a lot about the specific maneuvers that were involved.

BR - I have to agree with the book that I read on it that I feel it is the greatest generation.

JS - The Roll Call book?

BR - I just feel that way about it.

SH - I liked it on tape and you can run it up and down. I don't do a lot of audio books but that one is really good.

JS - When you were growing up you had your father, but in the community did this job and were there heroes and great men.

BR - As I grew up in the community, Red Neck community, or what ever you want to say, I never really heard anything said about the ones that didn't go other than the fact that they didn't go.

SH - That is exactly right. There were a couple of them around and all my dad would say was, "He didn't go." I do a speech for the sixth grade teacher. I think it is important that they understand, because it is not that far removed. What I try to do I try to pick a relative of the kid in school that they know and say, "His granddad did this." There are fewer and fewer in town. I try to connect it to real people in town. I say, "This is my dad but it is my son's granddad." I try to get them to understand that in the history books now, World War Two is not that big and they don't understand how important that was to the world.

JS - And to the individual just like you said.

SW - My folks were interested in history. We read a lot of books on it. I have read a lot of books on the Civil War and reading *Berlin Diary* shows how things began to get power in Germany. Ernie Pyle's book, *Brave Men* is an excellent book. I like those printed by University Press. *Brave Men* was a lot about the Italian Campaign in North Africa. After D-Day he came in when there were still bodies around and was there to describe the bloody hedgerows where they were trying to break out. When he talked about that gigantic raid that they made at Calais, they just leveled the place and the Germans had a division that was there. Patton's Third Army came in and the Americans fought some terrific defensive battles there trying to keep them from getting any further. The Americans wanted to cut them off at the gap and Germany was cut off, but some got out and that is where Squirt Kramer was a gunner.

BR - He was a T-C for a while, a tank commander

SW - They were among the first to link up with the Canadians as they closed the gap. They were cussing because they didn't think the Canadians got there fast enough.

BR - We were younger and we were watching something on TV and Dad wouldn't talk about it for a long time. This guy takes a piano wire out of a piano to garrote a guy. Dad said that is anything but quiet. He said, "If you want to kill somebody quiet you get behind him and pinch off his nose and mouth and stick your bayonet right under the ribs and he dies right there." It scared the dickens out of us kids. For weeks he would not watch TV with us.

JS - These tapes will be transcribed and will be in the Cimarron Library, the Kansas Historical Society and the Library of Congress. Is there anything important that you haven't said that you want on the tape? You are the second generation now.

SW - In the high school we used to have the fellows listed who served in the Army in World War Two. The ones that been killed had a star and were listed down at the bottom. We have the big memorial down at the Courthouse now so that takes away that need. It covers all wars.

BR - I don't think there is enough emphasis put on any generation that fights a war because they have kind of downplayed them since Vietnam. It is not fair to the soldiers. I have a son-in-law that is a soldier now.

SH - I think that in respect to the World War Two guys that it is a shame that we didn't get more documented. One thing, you couldn't get them to talk about it. That generation was not going to do anything that came off as bragging.

BR - It only came from my dad late in his life and we pestered him because we wanted to know. We are having the veterans pass away so fast. I wish we could have talked to all of them in time.

SW - There were a lot of stories that came down through friendships like mine with Steve's dad. On Boy Scout trips Don would talk and tell good stories.

BR - Not all the stories were bad things. Their unit was walking down a road and there were hedgerows on both sides and a Tiger Tank came over the hill from the other way. They took off down the road running and Dad jumped the hedge. They had a little guy called Rabbit in there group and he tried to jump the hedge three times and couldn't get over. That tank was shooting the roadway up right behind them and didn't shoot him. They ran him till he dropped down by the hedge and the tank turned around and went back over the hill.

SW - A friend told how when they were fighting on Okinawa they would use the gravestones in the cemetery for cover. One guy that was kind of heavy ran across there with bullets kicking up around him and he finally got to the other side. Everybody was really serious till then and then they all started laughing at him.

JS - I am sure they all had there own brand of humor that was very important to get them through that.

BR - We were watching a TV show and the soldiers were drunk and the enemy attacked. My dad said, "I have been there and I guarantee you, when the first shot comes, you are stone cold sober. I don't care how long you have been drinking; your adrenalin just takes over. When the fire fight is going on you are sober."

SH - This is a picture of when Eisenhower had just called out, "Are there any Kansas boys here?" My dad was among those coming forward. Another one in the Pacific from here was Stan Shoup. He was one of the sixth best marksmen in his battalion. He had seven campaign stars from the South Pacific. That was all the major campaigns. He was assigned to guard the Admiral. The six best marksmen did not do battle but floated around the Pacific on guard duty to protect the Admiral.

JS - Some of the men that I visited with told me that it was the first time they had talked about their war experiences. They wanted to come home and forget about it and get on with their lives.

BR - That is true. My mother used to get after my dad over money sometimes and he would say, "You are just one bullet away from being alive or dead and I am alive." Everything else just didn't stack up. The mortgage, whether the wheat was good, whether he worked tomorrow, he was just pretty glad to have another day to live.

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Tape 2 of 2

END
